

Duxbury's town landings

Part II: The push to create more town landings — 1895-1919

Editor's note: This series of stories providing an in-depth look at the town's landings originally ran in 1999. In light of the recent hubub surrounding Howland's Landing/Blairhaven, we thought our readers would appreciate another look. The stories have been edited slightly from the 1999 printing. This is the second of the three-part series. Part 1 defined town landings and delved into the histories of the six oldest landings. Part 2 examines the push to create new town landings in the early 1900s. Part 3 will focus on the issues surrounding town landings and how they have been controversial through the years.

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At the turn of the last century, Duxbury was transformed. An influx of summer people had discovered the wonders of this quaint, seaside hamlet and began buying and developing coastal land. The small town atmosphere in which shore dwellers knew all their neighbors and accepted them traipsing across their properties to reach the sea was rapidly changing.

A town landing committee report from 1900 recognized this change along with the need to create more public access to the water: "Every year the attractions of this old, historic town, with its beautiful bay are drawing to its shores more and more people ... Your committee has interviewed several shore property owners with the view of procuring other town landings. Those interviewed, while found to be in hearty sympathy with the desired objects to be attained — a sympathy which has long and well been attested by their permitting the public to reach the water through their several properties — looked with disfavor upon the idea of sacrificing any rights they possess."

The committee warned the town fathers to take action and "bestir yourselves to acquire outlets to the bay, (or) the shore will be closed to the public from Josselyn Avenue to the Kingston line."



Howland's Landing is one of the newer (if you consider 1895 new) landings in town. Town Meeting recently voted to purchase the adjacent property, a former church retreat.

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— From a 1900 town report urging Duxbury to acquire more landings

Howland's Landing

In 1895, Duxbury's annual Town Meeting was asked to accept a road and landing near Allen's Wharf at Captain's Hill in what is now Standish Shore. This landing faces Kingston Bay and was "used to run to deep water," according to 1909



Dinghies line the road at Howland's Landing. A study committee is looking at ways to use the adjacent property, which is now known as Howland's Park.

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documents. A fish processing factory stood nearby.

Howland's is one of the town's most varied landings, frequented by boaters, fishermen, lobstermen, shellfishermen and swimmers. Used as a boat launch and a deep water anchorage with a capacity of about 100 boats, it is very popular with both residents and non-residents because it has parking for both vehicles and boat trailers and there is enough room on the road to turn around a car and trailer.

"It's a beautiful landing," said Duxbury's Harbormaster Donald Beers.

A town landing committee report from 1975 stated that this area could be considered for further development if the New Church Union Headquarters in Boston ever decided to dispose of the Blairhaven property, a religious retreat abutting Howland's landing. The town purchased the land at the 2011 Town Meeting in a controversial vote. After town counsel ruled that the site could only be used for recreation (the idea of a satellite harbormaster's office had been floated) a study committee is continuing to examine how the town will use the land.

Ford's Stand

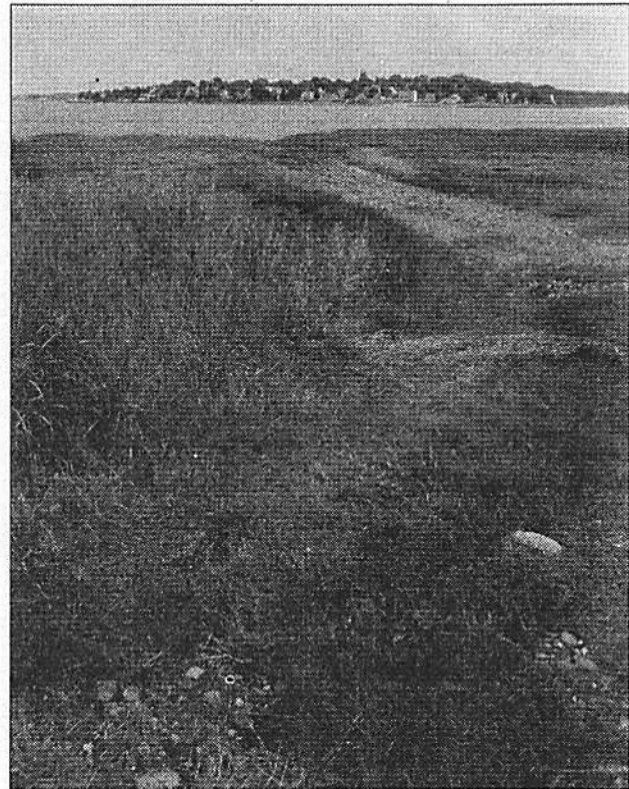
This landing is an access to Duxbury Beach and the Atlantic ocean beyond. Tucked at the end of Ocean Rd. North, it dates to 1897 when town meeting was asked whether it would accept a highway between the south end of Cut Island and the north end of the Hummock at Duxbury Beach. The 1975 report recommended the town study the use of this landing and consider making improvements for expanded parking facilities and better foot travel and security. It stated: "If the Selectpersons would appoint a study committee...to ascertain and investigate the limits and physical assets of this site (as well as the past abuses), the town may well develop one of the four most important landings here."

The 1900s: More Town Landings Are Created

As the late 1800s slipped into the early 1900s, the landings committee could see that the shoreline of Duxbury was becoming further sealed off to the public. It sympathized with the "interior villagers who can now only reach the water by sufferance, without in many cases going miles out of their way." Therefore, the committee recommended the town obtain one landing near Hall's Corner and two on Border St., "a suitable distance apart." Border St. was renamed Bay Rd. in 1915. "Your committee urge these landings, honestly believing them to be a public necessity," stated the report. The two desired landings off Bay Rd. became Hick's Point and Landing Road.

Hick's Point and Landing Road Landings

In 1906, the town landing committee began negotiating for land at Hick's Point and at Landing



The town landing at Hick's Point. Today, this landing is in a residential neighborhood and access to it is very secluded, with one feeling like a trespasser traveling in front of a private home to reach the landing site.

Photos by Anne Steele

Road, on property then owned by Mr. Foote and Mr. Crosby. In 1909, \$500 was appropriated to create a landing at the end of Hick's Point. Today, this landing is in a residential neighborhood and access to it is very secluded, with one feeling like a trespasser traveling in front of a private home to reach the landing site. But the landing itself is clearly marked with two cement boundaries. There is room for a car or two, but walking may be preferable.

Landing Road, also off Bay Road, was established at the same time as Hick's Point, but unlike that landing, this area is much more accessible to the public. A sandy beach and swim float mark this area as used for neighborhood recreation. Also, some boats are moored to the side of this bathing beach.

Mattakeeset Court

The town landing at Mattakeeset Court dates to 1900 and its road to 1902. During this time, this landing was not as active as it is now and various improvements were made to it by the town, such as in 1916 when the town acquired 100 feet more frontage and spent \$400 to upgrade the area. In 1909, the town landing committee recommended the town make arrangements with Mr. John A. Irwin to purchase his marsh land and water frontage at the foot of Mattakeeset Court, because this would give the town access to the government channel. The committee wrote then about the property: "It is not attractive in its present condition, and the recent storm has injured the bulkhead, but in years to come it would be a very valuable acquisition to the town."

How prophetic were these words, considering the importance of Mattakeeset Court to Duxbury today as its town pier is used for boat launching for both the public and the Duxbury Yacht Club, and as the site of the harbor master's department, Snug Harbor Boat Works and the Duxbury Bay Maritime School.

Harden Hill Landing

In addition to Mattakeeset Court, Howland's Landing and the Powder Point Bridge landing, Harden Hill is one of the town's most active landings. It is tucked off of Washington Street, near Hall's Corner. A road to this landing was created in 1904 through land owned by the Sisters of St. Margaret, and in 1941, that lane was named Harden Hill Rd. This landing now provides a boat launch, limited parking and great access to thriving shellfish beds. Swimmers also use the area. However, the asphalt launch area has fallen into disrepair, succumbing to erosion.

Josselyn Ave., Water St., and Winsor St. landings

Josselyn Avenue was laid out in 1907 over land belonging to John E. Josselyn. It currently is a dead end street that conceals its wooden walkway to the beach in a mass of raspberry brambles. The landing at the end is primarily used by neighbors, who tie up their dinghies there and use them to reach their boats moored at the Shipyard Lane anchorage. It is also an entry to the sandy beach at Shipyard Lane.

Winsor St. is an old lane, and documents date its landing to around 1919, but it may be older considering the surrounding homes are from an earlier period. Soon after the landing's creation, the town debated widening the end of Winsor Street "in order to make room to turn vehicles around without trespassing on private grounds." However, it is apparent this was never done because turning around here still requires many maneuvers without backing into someone's drive. The 1975 committee recommended the town maintain this area and post it as a foot landing. Also, it felt the town should cut back the brush to make an opening so sand and gravel could "be brought in to restore this nearly abandoned town landing." Today the Winsor St. landing has a narrow, steep wooden ladder leading down to a small beach where neighborhood dinghies are tied. Limited parking is allowed and shellfishermen and swimmers use this landing.

The Water Street landing was created in 1898, but the landing came into existence around 1901 when Town Meeting accepted an extension of that road to the shore. The road today ends in an overgrown culvert where neighboring lawns have grown over the asphalt. There is a feeling here, as at many other hidden neighborhood landings, of trespassing on private property. The access path is choked with bushes, but at the end awaits a little beach and the bright blue bay beyond.

In the decades following the creation of these nine landings, the town and its committees kept active by maintaining and guarding the existing landings. In the 1920s and 1930s as the town grew, Town Meeting appropriated funding for access road improvements and small exchanges of abutting land to permanently secure landing boundaries. The 1922 town meeting even went so far as to instruct its selectmen to "obtain and publish an opinion of the Town Counsel as to the rights and restrictions of the land owners, citizens, and others, to the shore and town landings." In 1947, the town amended its bylaws to further protect its landings, declaring that "no portion of any town landing shall be leased to any private party and no building shall be erected or maintained on any town landing except it be by the Town and for public use."

No new town landings have been created in the last half of the century, nor has another town landing committee been formed since the one in 1975. However, in the 24 years since then, town landings have not been completely forgotten. Some have grown, decreased or changed in their usage. Others have been the subject of conflict and controversy.

TOWN LANDING SERIES CONTINUES: Next week, the last in the series of town landing articles will examine these controversies including encroachment, access and maintenance.



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